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ABSTRACT

Children's increasing use of intentions and motives and decreasing use of outcomes to morally evaluate action are perhaps the most researched phenomena in moral cognition. However, relatively little is known about the acquisition of the ability to make moral evaluations and the processes involved. Based on the assumption that children's spontaneous representation of adult moral judgments can provide clues concerning how such concepts develop, a series of studies was conducted that contrasted the moral judgments children make with those they attribute to adults. Results from samples of elementary school students and parents demonstrate, overall, that children's judgments of adults are harsher and more outcome-oriented than their judgments of themselves. These results do not support the idea that children learn and maintain an intentionality standard by directly learning from or modeling after adults. It appears that Piaget's centration concept is inadequate to explain this judgmental process. A more complete explanation rests on two points: First, motives constitute a content category, but intention is a structural element. Second, when persons are asked to make moral judgments of acts with discernible outcomes, they take as a corollary task the provision of a causal account for the outcome. Considering two aspects of causal attribution and how they might affect moral judgments and taking into account a multiple causal schema for judgment formation may also be helpful in explaining this problem. (RH)

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MORAL INTENTIONALITY: CHILDREN'S REPRESENTATION OF ADULT JUDGMENTS AND ATTRIBUTION PROCESSES

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Moral Intentionality: Children's Representation of Adult Judgments and Attribution Processes

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Children's increasing use of intentions and motives, and decreasing use of outcome to evaluate actors morally is perhaps the best known and most researched phenomenon in moral cognition. However, relatively little is known about its acquisition and about the processes by which it occurs. These twin problems, acquisition and process, are the foci of our talk today. First, we shall discuss the rationale and findings of a paradigm designed to show how moral intentionality is not acquired. Second, we shall briefly sketch a model for describing how and why children judge moral actions and actors according to their motives and intentions or according to the outcomes they produce. The latter is largely conjectual but we shall adduce some evidence from our own and others' research which we believe is consistent with the model. In the end we shall try to tie up the issues of acquisition and process, and the two research threads.

Before going on to substantive matters, we would like to acknowledge with thanks the contributions of a number of students and colleagues who have aided us in our work, in particular, Debbie Gill, Gina Rivera, Rudi Palmieri, Xiomarra Rojas, Cathy Hayes, Jeff Shaw, Randy Blank and especially John Munk and Alan Supraner.

First, let us consider the problem of acquisition. Acquisition is often explained in terms of adult examples and teachings (e.g., Liebert, 1979). A number of studies have demonstrated in the laboratory that modeling procedures can modify moral intentionality (e.g., Bandura & McDonald, 1963). However, little is known about how children spontaneously represent adult moral judgments. Yet these representations

can provide clues as to how moral concepts develop. For example, if children develop and maintain an orientation towards intentionality by directly modeling adult moral judgments, such advances in the child's moral thought should be anticipated or accompanied by parallel changes in the moral judgments ascribed or attributed to adults. However, if children's constructions of morality are less directly influenced by actual adult examples and instructions, then these attributed judgments might lag behind or bear no systematic relationship to the children's own judgments. That is, children might believe that adults are outcome-oriented well after the children themselves have adopted an intention criterion.

Therefore, in a series of studies we have contrasted the moral judgments children make and those they attribute to adults. In doing so, we have paid special attention to difference between the own and attributed judgments by type of story and age of subject.

Let us describe our method in a little detail. We individually interviewed children, from grades 1 through 6, about a number of moral stories featuring different levels of motives (good or altruistic, neutral, and bad or malevolent) and different levels of outcome. In the first study, the outcomes used were large and small damage. In the subsequent studies bad outcomes (meaning damage to things and losses to persons) were contrasted with good outcomes (meaning no damage to things, better functioning of things, and gains to persons) in combination with good bad motives. Here is an example of a good-motive-bad outcome story: A child and a friend are each working on posters for a school contest. The friend needs paints the hero lends the friend two bottles of paint. They don't know that one of the bottles

is cracked, and paint gets all over the friend's poster, ruining it and preventing him or her from entering the contest.

The stories were constructed so that they have a setting, clear motives and intentionality, and material and social outcomes. The children made their own and attributed judgments along a 9-point scale which extended from "not bad" to "very bad" in the first study, and "very very good" to "very very bad" in subsequent studies. They also gave reasons to justify both kinds of judgments and these reasons were coded according to a set of categories--which included the following: motives and intentions; outcome for things and person; carelessness; and, rule violation and disobedience. A set of probes were used to help specify and disambiguate their responses.

Seventy-three children from grades 1, 3, and 5 from a Roman Catholic parochial school located in a lower middle/working class urban area participated in the first study. Four stories, two featuring child characters, and two, adult characters were presented. One of each kind had good motives with large damage, and one had bad motives with small damage.

Some of the results of this study were clear-cut, but some were hard to interpret. We think this complexity may have been due to failure of the large-small damage contrast and other aspects of the procedure to be clear to some of the subjects. These problems were rectified in our subsequent studies. Here, we will focus on those findings which have proven robust in the later studies. For the two adult stories, attributed judgments were identical to own judgments on the bad motive-small damage story, but attributed judgments were harsher than own judgments on the good motive-large damage story. Further,

reference to material damage was used more often to explain the judgments attributed to adults than to explain own judgments, while own reasons more often referred to intentions or moitves. The results for the child stories were complicated, and time does not permit us to go into details.

Eighty-one children from grades 2 through 6 in another Roman Catholic parochial school also in a lower-middle/working class urban area participated in the second study. We presented 11 stories all featuring child actors, boys for boys, and girls for girls, and all four combinations of good and bad motives with good and bad outcome. The good motive-bad outcome stories varied as to setting, contest vs. non-contest, presence of disobedience, and, the possibility of carelessness.

The general results were that the judgments the children attributed to adults were significantly harsher than the children's own judgments for four of the five stories with good motives and bad outcome. This finding was modified by a general tendency for the own-attributed judgment differences to <u>increase</u> with grade and in some instances to obtain only for one sex or the other. Nonetheless, the overall pattern is clear. Attributed judgments were harsher than own, but only on good motive-bad outcome stories. Further, own judgments were significantly more often justified by reference to the actor's motives or intentions, and reasons attributed to adults more often referred to carelessness and rule-violation or disobedience.

We also obtained scale judgments on six of the stories from a subset of parents of the children, 17 mothers and 5 fathers. The parents made their own judgments, which could be compared to the judgments the children had attributed to them, <u>and</u> they attributed judgments to the children, which could be compared to the children's own judgments.

The results here were also quite consistent. The judgments that the children attributed to adults were substantially and significantly harsher than their mothers' own judgments, but only on stories with bad outcome, regardless of the kind of motive involved. This was true for all four of the stories with bad outcome that children and parents both judged.

There are two puzzles about these results. One stems from the nature of the first two samples. The subjects in these studies were enrolled in Roman Catholic parochial schools and were largely from lower-middle and working class families. Could it be that the findings are restricted to such populations because of the supposedly authoritarian and harsh socialization views of parents and children from such families? The second puzzle lies in the data from the second study. While the judgments attributed to adults on the good motive-bad outcome stories did not decline with grade, neither did the children's own judgments, as one would expect from Piaget's findings. Time does not permit us to go into the possible reasons for this. In any case, while we have demonstrated that children's attributed judgments are harsher and more outcome-oriented than their own judgments, the results from the second study do not show that this difference involves the expected Piagetian monotonic change in harshness in own judgments.

For both reasons we conducted a third study with upper-middle class children and a more carefully designed set of stories. The ten stories included a core set of four stories containing two exemplars of each of the four combinations of good-bad motives with good-bad outcome. Subjects were children, 16 in each in grades 1, 3, and 6. We included the first grade in this study because past research and our first study indicate that it may be between the first and second grades that the

major change takes place in the typical middle-class sample of American children.

In some ways the results were just as expected. Analysis of the quantitative scale judgments and the qualitative reasons were in accord with Piaget's findings. Harshness of own judgments decreased significantly with grade on the two good-motive-bad outcome stories and increased significantly on the two bad motive-good outcome stories. Reference to motives in justifying judgments increased markedly with grade, especially from grade 1 to grade 3. So far, so good. However, when we looked at the scale data, our hearts sank. The own-attributed differences in scale judgments were disappointingly small and usually nonsignificant. Our spirits were much improved when we examined the reasons. Here, as before, reference to motives and intentions was more frequent in justifying own judgments than in explaining the attributed judgments, though these differences were only significant in the third and sixth, not in the first, grade.

Further, we also obtained scale judgments from a subset of the parents 17 mothers and 11 fathers. Like for the working and lower-middle class parents of the parochial schoolchildren, the judgments attributed to these upper-middle professional and business parents by their children were significantly harsher than were the parents' own judgments, but only or primarily where bad outcome was involved. The results were stronger for the mothers, but held for the fathers on some of the stories.

Thus the results for the third sample were generally similar to those for the first two samples, at least regarding reasons and comparisons between parents and children.

These findings may be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it is possible that children distort the teachings and examples of parents. Consistent with this is the finding that the judgments children attribute to adults are harsher and more outcome-oriented than the judgments actually made by their mothers. This distortion might be psychodynamically based and serve to exorcise the harshness and primitiveness the child finds in him or herself, or it might serve to preserve the child's sense of autonomy---allowing the child to believe that he or she has so-to-speak "invented the moral world". The distortion might also or alternatively be based on cognitive processes. It is possible that parents stress a more sophisticated conception of intentionality than children can comprehend, including concepts such as foreseeability and controllability involved in judgments of carelessness. So for example, when a child spills the milk again on the breakfast table, the exasperated parent may express anger because the child "should have known better", but the child---cognitively incapable of such complexity---may conclude, "mommy (or daddy) is angry at mess".

Alternatively, parents <u>may</u> be more outcome-oriented and harsh in their reaction to any bad outcome than is usually believed to be the case, and than they let on when answering questions provided by those not-to-be-trusted "experts" known as psychologists.

The point is that, regardless of which of these explanations is true, the finding does not support the idea that children learn <u>and</u> maintain an intentionality standard by directly learning from or modelling adults. Either adults don't teach the intentionality standard, or they do teach it, but are misunderstood because of the child's defensiveness or cognitive limitations. Exaggerating somewhat, one might

conclude from these findings that children learn moral intentionality in spite of, not because of, parents.

We now turn to the second part of out presentation concerned with the issue of judgmental process. First, we do not believe that Piaget's centration concept explains much of our or others' data. This is evidenced by the responses of even young children to a single story which shows that they take both the motive and outcome information into a account in arriving at a moral judgment though they may weigh the outcome more and motives less than do older children. For example, a not atypical response is, "not bad because he tried to help his friend, but not good because he spoiled the poster."

We think other explanations are necessary. The one we shall sketch rests primarily on two points. The first has been stressed by Keasey in his excellent 1977 review and by our discussant today, Tom Berndt, in an important paper in 1977 (Berndt & Berndt 1977). These writers stressed that motives and intentions are not the same, and may well have different developmental courses, with motives comprehended and used as moral criteria well before intentions. We thoroughly agree, but would stress further the qualitative difference between motives and intentions. It seems to us that motives constitute a content category, referring to the aim or goal of the actor, but that intention is a structural element relating different content elements, in particular, the motive on the one hand and the outcome/act on the other. That is, when we say that an act or outcome is intentional, we mean that the outcome or act is causally and, by implication, morally related to the motive. When we say that the act or outcome is unintentional, we mean that the outcome or act is not causally and therefore not morally

related to the motive. It is this relationship with which the young child has difficulty. We must now turn to the second principle or premise of our model.

We believe that when children (or adults) are asked to make moral judgments of acts with discernible outcomes, particularly when the outcome-motive relationship is unintentional, they take as a corollary task to offer a causal account for the outcome. For this reason, we believe the kinds of causal attributions they make are critical in determining the shape of their moral judgments. (Please note that we are now using "attribute" and attribution" in a somewhat different sense then we did before. We now mean, causally explain.)

Let us consider then two aspects of causal attribution and how they might affect moral judgment: First, the difference between attributing events to the situation and to the actor. What should be the consequences of attributing unintended outcomes to the situation? As Berndt in his 1975 study of reciprocity and Marijana Benesh-Weiner today point out, this causal focus will tend to modify the judgment of the act. In the moral situations being considered, we suggest the following: If the outcome is accounted for by reference to the situation, then the actor may be judged according to his or her stated motives, good if the motives are good and bad if they are bad. If---on the other hand---the outcome is explained by reference to the actor, then the actor's motives, which now causally explain the outcome may be distorted or reinterpreted to match the outcome more closely, promoting what Piaget called objective responsibility. So paradoxically, situational attributions should promote a motive standard for moral evaluation. Nonetheless, note that the explanation of this orientation to outcome is based not on ignoring the motives but transforming them, a point that has been suggested by

studies by Mike Smith (Smith 1977), and more directly by another panel member, Andrea Sedlak in her 1979 study (Sedlak, 1979).

Is there any evidence to support the direct association between situational attribution and judgments according to motives? Yes, we believe there is indirect and direct evidence. First, as Piaget suggested and as Keasey showed in 1977, children are more apt to judge others according to the outcome but self according to motive. How is this consistent with our first hypothesis? It has oft been noted, for example, by Jones and Nisbett (1971) that there is a persistent attributional bias whereby self behavior is explained by reference to the situation but others' behavior by reference to the person. Thus Keasey's finding of greater emphasis on motive in morally evaluating the self might be mediated by attributing the outcome to the situation rather than to the person when self is involved. Perhaps this is due to the greater ease in taking one's own perspective than the perspectives of others, especially for young children.

The direct evidence in support of this hypothesis comes from a study of twenty unusually bright kindergarten and first grade children who were presented with four moral stories, two featuring good motives and bad outcome, one with neutral motives and bad outcome, and one with bad motives and good outcome. They were asked to morally evaluate the actor along a nine-point scale, causally explain the outcome, and then reevaluate the actor. The causal attributions were coded independently along a five-point scale, which ranged from attributions which definitely focused on the persons to those which definitely focused on the situation. An example of a clear-cut person attribution would be:

All the paints went over it. (Why?) The other girl never watched out for the paint.

She gave the other girl a leaky paint.

An example of a clear-cut situation-attribution would be:

The paints spilled all over the poster (Why?)

There was a leak (Why?) There was a crack (Did she know?) No

We found correlations of .71 and .58 between harshness of moral judgment and causal attribution for the two good motive-bad outcome stories, both significant at the .05 level, and a correlation of .43 for the neutral motive-bad outcome story, which just missed the .05 level. The correlation for the bad motive-good outcome story was nonsignificant, which we believe may be due to certain ambiguities about the story.

So far, so good. However, there is a problem with this causal attribution-moral judgment hypothesis. It implies that the shift away from emphasis on outcome, to an emphasis on motives and intentions is due to a developmental shift from personal to situational attributions. No clear-cut evidence exists for such a developmental change. Indeed, the little evidence concerning the matter, for example, Josephson's unpublished 1977 thesis suggests a shift in the other direction, from situational to personal causal attribution. While we think the latter evidence is not conclusive, (an issue too lengthy to go into here), the evidence does suggest that reducing moral intentionality to situational-personal attributions is too limited, and---we might add---too close to a simple centration hypothesis against which we argued earlier. So now we shall shift to multiple causal schema.

The type of moral situation under consideration can be understood to include: an event to be explained, the outcome, and two sets of causes, the motive, and other (mainly situational) causes. Unintentional or mismatched incidents, either good-bad or bad-good, involve motive-causes which normally are understood as inhibitors---that is normally good motives inhibit bad outcomes, and vice versa---along with other facilitating causes. However, the unintentional nature of the act means that the inhibitory motive is functionally absent. The schema is depicted in Slide 1. From the slide it is apparent that if the unintentional nature of the act is not understood and the inhibitory motive is thought to be functionally present, then strong situational or other causes must be inferred. If they are not, then the reasoner finds him- or herself in the upper left quadrant, where no outcome is possible. In subjective terms, the causal reasoner thinks, how can such a (bad) outcome (E) have happened if such (good) motives were present and other situational etc. causes were not, or were weak? This uncertainty or confusion would direct the reasoner to use two possible attributional solutions. The first is to treat the actor in part as a nonvolitional cause, thus splitting the actor into an inhibitory-volitional cause and a facilitating nonvolitional cause, and fuse the causality and moral responsibility tasks. An example of this is the type of reason we cited earlier, "good because he meant well but bad because he caused the damage". The second strategy presupposes a partial understanding of intentionality and the distinction between causal explanation and moral evaluation. Nonetheless, it involves cognitive distortion, in that the motives are transformed from their stated character, good or bad, into or towards their opposite. This, in effect, converts the causal schema from a facilitating-inhibitory type into a

two- facilitating-cause type, as in Slide 2. We should note that though as Andrea Sedlak showed, this involves distortion and deviation from adult logic, adults and probably late adolescents also do this---inferring "true" motives and responsibility from outcomes---when they use concepts such as devious or unconscious motivation, negligence, carelessness, and so forth. Thus, this second strategy may anticipate later developments beyond simple intentionality, a topic we are presently researching with adolescents.

The above---and we have just sketched the model---suggests that what has been called "objective responsibility" includes at least three kinds of responses. First, there is the infrequent "error" because of centering. Such responses involve an attentional process, and therefore should be highly variable and instable. Second, there is the response which results from strategy 1, above, involving a complete misunderstanding of intentionality and a failure to differentiate causal attribution and moral evaluation. We have termed this, a structural error. Third, there is the attributional response, which involves transformation of the motive from its stated form to one which can help causally account for the outcome.

As yet, we do not have strong evidence for the model or the existence of these different rypes of outcome responses, but there are some predictions which follow from this model. Indeed, time does not permit us to enumerate them. We do want to mention one additional kind of evidence, however, which can tie together the two parts of this talk and the two uses of attribution. We reported earlier persistent difference between children's own moral judgments and those they attribute

or ascribe to adults, with the latter being more harsh and outcome-oriented. Can this be because children explain outcome more by reference to the situation, but believe that adults use more personal attributions. For example, as one of our subjects, a third grade girl, said, "grownups would say my hand did it; I would say the rug did it."

In our current research we hope to show that the persistent differences we have found between children's own judgments and those they attribute or ascribe to adults is based, at least in part, on the causal attributions children make and those which they believe adults make. If this proves to be true-and relevant data remain to be analyzed-then the model we have proposed will receive some support, and the findings we have obtained will have received some theoretical underpinnings.

In general, we believe that investigators should shift their attention and efforts from "proving" or "disproving" moral intentionality as a developmental phenomenon. The moral intentionality phenomenon is real. Rather models should be constructed which explain how the model intentionality principle operates, its extent and limits, and research programs developed to test the values of these models.

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TABLE 1

MULTIPLE CAUSAL SCHEMA WITH FACILITATING AND INHIBITORY CAUSES

Inhibitory Cause (Motive)	Facilitating Cause(s): Weak	Facilitating Cause(s): Strong
Present		E
Absent	E	E^1

E = effect or outcome

E^1 = strong effect or outcome

TABLE 2

MULTIPLE CAUSAL SCHEMA WITH TWO FACILITATING CAUSES

Facilitating Cause	Weak	Strong
Present	E	E^1
Absent		E

E = effect or outcome

E^1 = strong effect or outcome